

**Teachers College Reading and Writing Project**  
**Writing Curricular Calendar, Sixth Grade, 2012–2013**  
**Unit One - Launching and Raising the Level of Personal Narrative Writing**

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**Unit One – Launching and Raising the Level of Personal Narrative Writing**

*September*

The skills of telling their own stories and narrative writing are essential for our adolescents for the rest of their lives. They not only inform the way they write and read stories, but are also key ingredients in non-narrative forms, including persuasive essays, informational reports, and journalism. Quite frankly, storytelling will impact all areas of their professional and social lives as well. From college entrance essays to job cover letters to on-the-job writing, a strong command of narrative elements makes writing stand out and enables effective communication. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) has set the expectation that students will develop stronger and stronger narrative writing skills from kindergarten through twelfth grade; in all content areas students are expected to know how to use narrative elements within their non-narrative writing.

Second, beyond test scores, data, and standards, our adolescents need opportunities to write in order to make sense of their lives. It is a time of personal upheavals, emotional roller coasters, shifting perspectives that dramatically change our students' lives forever. Teachers who devote time each year to a study of narrative writing always report that they hear their students' voices like never before, that they find the tone of their classroom—often that of the school—shifts in dramatic ways. Narrative writing is not just an expectation within national standards, it is a tool that quite literally changes lives.

What Standards This Unit Addresses

This unit particularly addresses Common Core writing standard 3, including its sub-standards. The standards for narrative writing are particularly high, and your students will need to draw upon and extend their narrative skills from prior RWP writing workshops in order to engage the reader, provide an organizational structure that sequences events, develop characters, and provide closure. Reading and Writing Project asks students to do even more - we ask them to focus on pivotal moments in their lives, and to apply the same close reading strategies to their own narratives, that they do to reading literature (standard 2 in particular, discerning central ideas, lessons, and themes).

Establishing a Baseline and Creating a Starting Point from which Kids Make Dramatic, Steady Growth: Assessment, Rubrics and Calibrating Instruction

If one of your major goals is teaching your students to write with independence and stamina, the next goal is for students' writing to become dramatically better across the unit. In order to hold yourself and your students to this goal, it is critically important that you start the year by devoting a day to an on demand writing assessment. You can make this on demand writing feel celebratory. Give your students a chance to "show off" what they know about narrative writing. You might say, "I'm really eager to understand what you can do as writers, so before you do anything else, please spend today writing the very best personal narrative, the best anecdote or

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memoir, of one particular time in your life. You'll have forty minutes to write this true-story of one small moment. Write in a way that shows me all that you know about how to do this kind of narrative writing."

The data-in-hand that you collect by doing an on demand writing assessment will be invaluable as you take the time to learn what they already know and can do. The next day, you may decide to admire publicly how much they know by collecting some of the qualities of good writing that you saw many students were able to put into action. You can ask students to engage in self-evaluation, analyzing their own writing for evidence of those qualities. You may want to give students an opportunity to show their on demand writing to a partner, citing evidence of what they did as writers. Within two days of being back in school, your students should be acting, thinking, and talking like writers.

The job is not just to give this on demand assessment, but also to take seriously the challenge of making sure that as the unit unfolds, your instruction is calibrated around this data, and the students' work gets progressively better. That work, done on day one, can function as your starting gate. After students collect narrative entries for a few days, you will want to ask students to look back at their on demand piece and at the narrative entries they have written since then. Are the entries they have written since the start of school dramatically better than their on demand pieces? Frankly, all too often we have seen students' writing go down hill, as if they tried hard on the first day, when being assessed, and then just dutifully fill the page every day after that. If students work is not increasing in palpable ways, you will want to act shocked and say, "This simply can't be! Go back and rewrite this entry, making it your very best."

John Hattie, author of *Visible Learning*, has done a mega-study compiling thousands of studies from every walk of life that attempt to understand the factors that support achievement. When looking at data from twenty to thirty million students to see the factors that were especially influential, Hattie came away saying that it is incredibly important for learners to be working towards crystal clear, challenging but accessible goals, and it is important for them to receive informative feedback on what they've done that is working and that clarifies the next steps they can take. It will be important, then, for you to illuminate for students what it is that they are trying to accomplish.

Early in this unit, you'll give students the opportunity to study examples of what they are aiming to create. Students will engage in close reading of complex mentor texts in order to learn more about narrative craft, and they'll annotate and note the qualities they wish to replicate. As they set goals, you'll want to make sure students have plenty of time to work towards them with repeated practice and feedback. An important part of that feedback will come from the kids themselves. You can expect that at the start of writing time, students reread their writing, and think, "What's the work I'm going to do next?" They may even create a personal goal sheet, where they record the strategy or goal they are working on, before writing. And certainly, you'll want to give them ample time to study the very rubrics that you use to assess them.

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The RWP urges you to think how best to communicate expectations for narrative writing in ways that students can understand so that they are able to self-assess, using a student-facing rubric. Students can note ways in which their writing still needs work, and you can help each writer set goals for future work. The act of setting a goal for oneself is important for writers, making it likely that they will not just be filling up pages in writers' notebooks, but that they'll consciously work towards employing strategies they've been taught and reaching towards qualities of good writing.

The continuum, which is available to our schools through the RWP website ([www.readingandwritingproject.com](http://www.readingandwritingproject.com)), describes narrative writing at the end of the grade. It aligns directly to the standards. For example, you will see that writers need to "orient and engage" the reader with an opening that gives detailed information about the character and that sets the story in place and time.

We suggest you sit with your grade team to assess student work in order to ensure consistency across the grade. Before meeting, each teacher will want to choose an on demand narrative that he or she feels exemplifies each level (for example, one piece for level 3, one piece for level 4, one piece for level 5). As a grade you can determine your final set of anchor papers—one piece for each level. The conversation that ensues during this process will help to make sure all teachers on the grade are consistent (or relatively so) in how they assess writing, by using the continuum.

In the end, hold yourself to the challenge of strengthening each and every child's work and plan to repeat the on demand assessment after the unit to measure this growth.

### Overview

As we start our first unit of writing, it is important to hold onto two ideas at once: our adolescent writers have most likely written many personal narratives before this one, and the process of growing as writers never ends. This means that we need to not only find ways to create a unit that feels fresh for adolescents, we also need to tailor this unit to the strengths and needs of our current students, instead of replaying the same teaching points from last year. We suggest that your sixth graders begin with personal narrative. However, if upon looking at your students' on-demand pieces you find they have fairly strong control of this type of writing, then you may decide that some of your writers are ready to launch solely with the memoir writing unit. In that case, look to the seventh grade curricular calendar for ideas on how to start the year with that sophisticated genre. To help you with this assessment, you might look at the *Narrative Writing Continuum*, which is available to Reading and Writing Project Schools through their link at [www.readingandwritingproject.com](http://www.readingandwritingproject.com). If your students are already writing on-demand pieces that fulfill the qualities described for level 6, you can feel comfortable moving to memoir. If, as is more likely, a lot of their notebook entries and on-demand writing looks more like level 4 and 5,

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or even level 3, you'll want to sharpen their narrative focus, and develop their narrative craft. For instance, the *Narrative Writing Continuum* suggests, when kids begin a story, that:

The opening often sets character in the midst of a situation, gives the reader some context for the central conflict of the story, and lays ground work for developing tension, changes or lessons. The reader is oriented to not only the plot but also the central meaning or significance of the story.

If it the majority of your students are writing beginning scenes in which they lay out some clues for the central conflict of a story, move onward. Chances are, though, that you'll want to dig in and work to raise the level of your kids' writing—the Standards give us a pretty high level of writing to aspire to. The *Narrative Writing Continuum* is aligned to that level, and will provide some perspective as you make curricular decisions.

The unit described here has two innovations the RWP has made from from prior years. The first begins to make motion toward memoir writing, providing scaffolds for our writers to produce more idea-driven, thematic narratives found in that genre. The second asks kids to write one personal narrative over two weeks, and then do it again, with more independence. This double cycle leads kids to develop a repertoire of writing skills, rather than waiting for you to lead them every day. This unit provides you an opportunity to teach a class of students the work called for by the Common Core for narrative writing, although students will need more than this one narrative unit before they will have reached the ambitious Standards for skill levels for sixth grade.

September is always a challenging month because we inevitably work toward two rather different goals: We want to establish well-managed, productive classrooms and rally students to work with enthusiasm on projects of great importance. Don't linger for a moment before getting your students going. Remind them that every day they will each choose a strategy for generating writing, and they will each write several entries that reflect all they already know about writing zoomed-in, focused narratives. Be sure, too, that they carry their notebooks and write more entries at home. The Common Core State Standards expects that starting in sixth grade students should be able to type a minimum of three pages "in a single sitting."

Extrapolate that out to the amount of handwritten pages the average sixth grader would need to equal three typed pages and we very quickly realize how essential it is to support our students in writing a great deal across the day. Compare the entries they write on the first day to the ones they write on, say, day five, and you will already see dramatic improvements as you quickly rope students back into doing all that they learned during previous years but may have forgotten over the summer.

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Decide Upon the Rituals and Structures That Will Support Productive Writing

By now, your students should know most systems and rituals in the RWP writing workshop, so you need not spend weeks and weeks establishing them. Your job is only to reclaim those as writerly and honorable, to rally writers to care about those structures and to understand that you care about them, and then to ratchet up the work writers do within those systems. If you are not clear about the rituals and structures that you will need to put into place, some are discussed below. In addition, talk with colleagues from previous grades and from your own grade, and read relevant pages of the *Guidebook to Units of Study for Teaching Writing* (2006). If you have systems in place that seem to work for the majority of your class but you feel stumped when facing the challenges of particular writers, you might also turn to one of the titles in the RWP Workshop Help Desk series, like *Reviving Disengaged Writers*, 5–8, by Christopher Lehman (2011).

In order to institute the routines and structures that will allow writers to work with engagement and some independence, you'll want to quickly gather some information on the structures and routines they were accustomed to during the previous year that you can reinvigorate. Don't start from scratch and reteach what your writers have learned to do over a whole sequence of years! Maybe you'll want to convene the class and say, "Can we talk about the structures that you already know for a writing workshop, ones we can just brush the dust off and get into right away, and can we talk about what our expectations will be for those structures?" Then you could ask the class to quickly jot or turn to a partner and describe things like, "How did you use your writer's notebook last year?" Students will presumably have come from different teachers so there may be several responses in the air. However they respond to whichever questions, reflect on how you can support them in going from good to great.

For example, by now students should see notebooks as indispensable tools for living writerly lives and as workbenches for experimenting with different strategies. If instead they previously viewed them as just another notebook to do schoolwork in, then you may have found one way to enliven this first unit. So you might very quickly establish a notebook routine that not only describes how to use their notebook in your classroom but also helps them hold a vision for why they will use their notebook this year. Certainly by the time RWP classroom students are in sixth grade, the writers' notebooks need to travel between home and school, and students should be writing entries in them every night and every day. Using evenings as well as school time for gathering entries doubles the volume of writing that students do in their notebooks—a worthy goal, especially this year as you only have one month to revive and extend your students' skills at writing personal narratives. The Common Core Speaking and Listening Standards also calls for students to come to conversations about the writing they've prepared. The notebook can serve as a springboard for students to prep for their writing talk. It allows them to jump back into their writing and reference it, talking off and pointing to the ideas jumping from the page.

Perhaps you talk with your students about school and home writing from previous years and you find that in some classes they tended to do "free writing" at home from prompts like, "What did

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you do this weekend?” Unfortunately, this type of writing often does not accomplish the goals we hope it will; it doesn’t typically lead to a growth in length or quality across the year. So what, then, will the system be for homework? Always this work extends and reinforces the teaching within the unit, giving students more time to practice at home the work they have already started in school. We suggest that students work on their writing every night for about ten minutes—though sometimes that work will include thinking about their writing, or reading some of it to themselves. That means a lot of nights when they’ll write a “Small Moment” entry that is about a page in length. Other nights they’ll work on revision and experimentation. Some nights they’ll think about their writing.

Another area you might uncover when talking with your students is that in the transition to middle school students might have difficulty managing their materials for their many classes. You will want to focus on spending time at the start of the year reinforcing the organizational work of being a student (be mindful that you may need to hold small-group troubleshooting lessons and even whole-class reminder minilessons from time to time). In addition to their writer’s notebook, will they have a drafting folder to hold their in-process work? Should they have loose-leaf paper on hand or will you supply it? How will you ensure they always have something to write with? Will you have an in-class portfolio system for students to collect their final writing, maybe with reflections and process work, from across the unit? The more you can provide systems of organization for your students and help them see why they are important, the more you will be supporting this tough transition to a new school-day format.

Just as you are helping your students make decisions about routines for their materials, you will need to organize your work with your various classes. What will your system be for collecting and reading student work? Will you collect the work from one table of writers every Monday, another table every Tuesday? Will you devote one evening a week to reviewing all student work? Will partners review each other’s notebooks on Fridays? Will partners sit beside each other in the meeting area and at their work areas or will you ask partners to choose a meeting space—sometimes, for those who can handle it, on the floor? Where will paper be kept and what will be the system to make sure students can access supplies when they need them without coming to you?

You can expect that at the start of writing time, students in the RWP classroom should reread their writing and think, “What’s the work I’m going to do next?” and then write a “self-assignment box” at the top of the page, record the strategy or goal they are working on, and then they get writing. The expectation that students will pause to think, “What will I do today?” nudges students to review the charts of strategies they have learned (one will list “Strategies for Generating Ideas,” one will be “Strategies for Revising,” one will be “Qualities of Good Narrative Writing,” and so on). The act of setting a goal for oneself is terribly important for writers who are not just filling up pages in writers’ notebooks but who are consciously working toward improved writing. Then, too, you can expect that sixth graders can draw from a variety of suggested ways to work with a partner, deciding on some days to use partnership time as a time

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to say aloud what each writer plans to do next. Other times, partnership time can be a time for the reader—not the writer—to read aloud the writer’s draft, allowing the writer to get some distance from it and develop hunches about ways to improve it. Another time, partners can look between an early and a later draft, asking, “Is this getting better or is it getting worse?” and thinking about next steps. By sixth grade, it will not take a lot of teaching for you to be able to let partnership time become a bit less under the thumb of the teacher. It will only be some days when you tell partners how to share their writing, and other days, you leave this choice to them. Again, collaborating partnerships are supporting the work of the first Common Core Speaking and Listening Standard by “posing and responding to specific questions with elaboration and detail by making comments that contribute to the topic, text or issue under discussion,” and reinforcing the idea that peer talk can push student writing to the next level.

Because your students can carry on with at least some independence, you will be free to teach (rather than to run to answer every raised hand). The most powerful teaching that you do will come in the form of providing crystal-clear feedback, showing students what they are doing that is working and showing them what they could do next that could take their writing to a whole new level. Research is clear that nothing a teacher can do has a greater effect than this combination: giving students clear goals, opportunities for engaged work, feedback that includes compliments, and a rallying cry to progress to worthy, significant, concrete next steps.

In order to hold yourself and your students to this goal, it is critically important that you start the year by devoting a day to an on-demand writing assessment. You can make this on-demand writing feel celebratory. Give your students a chance to “show off” what they know about narrative writing. During writing, be sure not to coach what they are doing, reminding them to write with details or to focus. You want to see what they do in a hands-off situation, and frankly, you will want to be in a position to show great growth from this starting point. On the next day, you may decide to admire publicly how much they know by bringing in a chart on which you collect some of the qualities of good writing that you saw most students put into action. If many of them are entering the school year already knowing the importance of craft moves, such as writing with direct dialogue or writing with details, then you can celebrate this—and expect it—after this. You may want to give your students an opportunity to show their on-demand piece to a partner, pointing out what they did as writers. Within two days of being back in school they should be acting, thinking, and talking like writers.

When you look at the on-demand writing, you’ll want to notice commonalities. That is, you are probably not going to give specific feedback to each of your sixty to one hundred writers yet. More likely, you are getting a sense of what your writers are already good at, and what they still struggle with. Use the *RWP Narrative Writing Continuum* to help you develop a few lenses, so this task doesn’t seem so overwhelming. For example, you might use the lens just of structure to get started—and you might find enough there to help you adjust your unit. That is, if kids are already writing focused pieces of a few related scenes, you could move on to elaboration. But if

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not, you'll be starting with how writers focus and begin pieces, and the structure details of the Continuum, which are aligned to the CCSS, should be helpful.

The job is not just to give this on-demand assessment but also to take seriously the challenge of making sure that as the unit unfolds, the students' work gets progressively better. That work, done on the first day, can function as your bottom line. After students collect narrative entries for a few days (and we'll describe this work later), you will want to ask students to look back at their on-demand piece and at the narrative entries they have written since then. Are those entries dramatically better than the on-demand piece? (Frankly, all too often we have seen students' writing go straight downhill, as if they tried hard on the first day when being assessed, and then worry only about filling the page and not about lifting the level of their writing.) If students' work is not increasing in palpable ways, you will want to act shocked and say, "This simply can't be! Go back and rewrite this entry, making it your very best! And after this, your writing needs to be getting steadily better as the year progresses." (Of course, no one's work is steadily better—we all try things that don't work, and that is fine. But you do want students to understand that the goal in a writing workshop is to lift the level of one's writing.)

With this kind of rapid start, your students will be eager to learn more about how to write and think like an author.

**Anticipate the Trajectory of Your Students' Work Across the Whole Unit**

We at the RWP believe the best way to support students with becoming more independent at narrative writing this early in the year is to shepherd them through two cycles of narrative writing within this first month. This means you will probably channel them to do on-the-run revision even as they draft. Then they will revise whichever one they think is stronger.

Before we describe the parts of this unit, let's scan the time line of students' work. You can anticipate that by the end of the third or fourth day of writing, your sixth graders will be ready to reread all their entries (presumably during a share session) and to select one that will be the seed idea for the narrative they will eventually publish. Then, they'll spend one or two days rehearsing for the draft they'll write outside the notebook. As part of this rehearsal, they should storytell multiple times, producing a few fast drafts of parts of that story, each time working toward new goals. By very early in the second week, they should devote one intense day to drafting on paper, written outside the notebook. As they draft, you are already teaching them some ways to lift the level of their writing, and they'll incorporate that teaching into their writing both by adding on and by improving the next parts as they compose them.

In the third week, you'll have students go through the first steps of the process again, with independence, over two days, so that by day three they are fast drafting—and the draft should be at a level higher than their initial entries were. You'll then want to teach your students to do some significant revision. Your goal will be to recruit them to reread, rethink, and envision their stories and write the unfolding drama, rather than relying on summaries. You'll also want writers

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to decide what meaning they want to put forward, and ensure they deliberately write in ways that allow them to forward those intended meanings, with many students making a move toward more sophisticated craft to develop these bigger themes. A study of a mentor text can inform this work. Eventually students will turn to editing, working on punctuation, paragraphing, spelling, and so on.

As students learn about narrative writing, some of the lessons will be explicit, taught in minilessons and conferences, and some of the lessons will be implicit, gleaned as they study texts that sound like those you hope they will soon write. Even just one dearly loved and closely studied text can infuse a writing workshop with new energy and opportunities for implicit learning. You will want to read a few focused narratives aloud and to pull your students to study one or two with tremendous detail. Some RWP uses often with middle school students include: selections from *Guys Write For Guys Read* edited by Jon Scieszka; Amy Erlich's *When I Was Your Age: Original Stories About Growing Up*; and Jerry Spinelli's *Knots in My Yo-Yo String*.

**Bend One—Getting Started with Narrative Entries and Revising from the Start**

**Launch Your Students' Writing by Recruiting Their Ideas for This Year's Workshop and by Collecting What They Know About Narrative Writing**

It is impossible to over-emphasize the importance of inspiration. As a teacher, think about a time when your work felt really good to you. Sift through all your teaching memories until you arrive at one such time. Now ask yourself, "What made that particular time in your teaching life so good?" My hunch is that it was powerful not because you could arrive late, leave early, no stress, no pressure, no expectations. My hunch is that the time when your work felt good was a time when you believed your input mattered, when you felt called upon to give and give and give some more, and you were willing to do so because you could tell you were affecting others, because you felt appreciated.

In this world where everyone is over-focused on accountability, on measuring and checking to make sure no one is stinting on any job, it is easy to lose track of our own beliefs about what people need in order to do good work. Your students are not all that different than you! Like you, they need to know that their ideas matter, that their voices count. They need to feel they are doing work that matters and is important to them. They will work harder if you inspire, rather than micro-control and punish. You will need to decide how you can launch the year in ways that tap students' energies as writers. There is no single answer for how to do this. And we could write up a lot of suggestions that could work or not work, depending on how they are done. The important thing is that you keep in mind that your students are not all that different from you and I, and that we treat each other in ways that we hope we'll be treated.

Many teachers from the RWP workshops have found that one of the ways to recruit student investment in the writing workshop is to invite them to co-author plans for the year. If you ask

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adolescents to reflect on times when writing has been good for them and times when it has not been good, chances are that you will end up having an honest and heartfelt talk that could set the stage positively for the year. You can invite your students to reflect on their lives as writers if you tell a story about a time in your own writing life. Remember, if you want them to bring their self-doubts and vulnerabilities to the community, it helps if you tell about such times in your life. Take a moment when writing was hard for you, and tell that story using your narrative writing skills to intensify it. Students will be more apt to respond with their stories. You can tell your students that you used to be all the things that they may be (afraid, bruised from bad instruction they may have received) and that deep down, you may still be. But try to be the sort of leader who tells a story that goes like this: "I once was...but now I am..."

You may ask your sixth graders to think and jot quickly about a time in their lives when writing was a particularly good thing or particularly hard thing, and then have them talk in partnerships, or tables (two sets of partners), or as a whole-class community, about what they found. The goal, of course, is to move beyond this to thinking, "How can we make this into the best possible year for us as writers? How can we support each other as writers?" In similar ways, you could lead students to jot, talk, and share about what it is they need from a writing partner. As you do this, bring students in on the fact that they are helping you plan how writing will go in your classroom. In any case, in one way or another, you will want to invite your students to join together to think about the question, "What kind of a writing community do we want to form together?"

We also think it is absolutely important that you as an RWP teacher live in the classroom as a passionate writer, as a person who cannot imagine living without a writer's notebook at your side. You will need to bring your own notebook into the class, to talk about how the notebook threaded through your life over the summer and to tell your students ways in which the fact that you write makes you into a more aware, wide-awake, reflective person. Assume the role of being an avid writer, even if this is a bit of a stretch.

If you cannot comfortably assume the role of writing mentor in your class, then it will be all the more crucial that you read aloud texts written by other authors and tell stories of the authors' writing lives and identities. You can also read aloud texts that talk about writing and the writing life. The RWP recommends, for example, Peter Reynolds' little picture book, *Ish*; Byrd Baylor's *I'm in Charge of Celebrations*; a bit from *Seeing the Blue Between: Advice and Inspiration for Young Poets* by Paul B. Janeczko; excerpts from *Speaking of Journals*, edited by Paula Graham; and poems by William Stafford, Mary Oliver, Billy Collins, and others.

#### Generating Narrative Writing

Any great writer stands on the shoulders of other great writers. Just listen to Walter Dean Myers, J. K. Rowling, Rick Riordan, or a host of others talk about their inspirations and inevitably they will talk about authors whose work spoke to them deeply and affected their life path. You could

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study a published text, or prior students' writing, and even students' notebooks, doing close reading of the work of these authors—really studying the writing moves they make.

After immersing students in a few great narrative texts, you will want to remind them that they already have a repertoire of strategies that they can use to come up with ideas for personal narrative stories. Tell your students that this year, you will teach them how to use those familiar strategies, well, like professional writers do. Ask them to share strategies they already know and then compile them on a chart; you can call it, "Strategies for Generating Narrative Writing." Please do not dust off a chart you used during previous years—students should see their own ideas and words (and yours as well) going onto chart paper and feel like those charts capture the contours of their lived experience in a classroom.

Your job is to lift the level of the work that your students do with those strategies, and not simply teach them yet more strategies. For example, your students will probably already know that writers sometimes think of a person, place, or thing that matters, then list several small moments they've experienced with that person, place, or thing, and choose one of these to write as a story. They may not realize that writers take no more than five minutes to complete that process. It's important that writers quickly jot down a person, place, or thing that matters, list a few small moments they had with the subject, and select one of these moments and begin writing the "long" story on the page. This process of brainstorming does not encompass one day's writing workshop!

Teach sixth graders that when they list small moments they have spent with a person, each moment is best described in a sentence (or a long phrase), and not in a single word. If a child writes "Joe" and under that name writes "baseball," that child is not set up to produce a focused narrative. But if under the name "Joe" the child writes, "Joe taught me how to catch a baseball," then the child is off to a good start toward writing a narrative. You can also teach students that as writers we do not record every thought that crosses our minds; we instead weigh ideas and record only those we think are promising. Good writers select moments that grip us, that make us feel something intensely. Moments of strong emotion are often worth delving into.

It is also important to teach students that in a single day of writing, they will produce more than just one entry. Each student in an RWP classroom uses a strategy to generate an idea for writing, writes the entry, and then, fairly often, has time to return to the original brainstorming list and select a second idea, writing another entry. Because your adolescents will have already participated in the RWP writing workshops and will already bring with them a repertoire of strategies for generating writing, from the start you can teach them that writers carry a cumulative repertoire of strategies with them, a toolbox of sorts, and they draw on these tools as needed. For example, you might say, "You already have a whole repertoire of strategies for generating narrative writing," and then send your students off to write using any of the strategies on the list. By referring to all that students already know and inviting them to draw upon that full repertoire, you can emphasize that learning to write is cumulative and that any new work that writers do will always stand on the shoulders of previous work.

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You also want to pass along new strategies your students may not seem to know and use, selecting strategies you believe will channel students toward writing pieces especially significant to them. One way to write a powerful personal narrative, for example, is to think about turning points, moments when we feel or learn something important. Often this is the very first (or very last) time we did something. If a writer thinks about a time he or she learned something, this memory is apt to produce a powerful story. Another way writers create powerful personal narratives is to think about a strong emotion (hope, worry, sadness, pressure) and think, “When, specifically, did I feel that emotion?” Sixth graders often respond to three column lists, of issues or feelings/people/moments.

We often generate ideas for writing by thinking about major issues in our lives, such as bullying, family pressure, or fitting in. Then we think of specific times when we struggled with that issue. We can also think about the social issues that we have encountered and begin to capture moments where our gender, race, or class influenced our lives in complicated ways. As you teach strategies for generating writing, share little bits of the stories those strategies led you to write. This will help show adolescents how to write with focus and detail, while simultaneously teaching strategies for generating writing. Finally, teach your class that stories of significance can be found in the smallest and most ordinary occasions.

Although you may teach one particular strategy on a given day, when students go off to write, some will draw on strategies from previous days. Some will not need any particular strategy because they’ve been living like writers, coming to the desk ready to write. Still others will be continuing on an entry started on an earlier day. Take a count one day. How many of your students are using the strategy you taught that day? Believe it or not, hopefully less than half! If most of your class routinely does only whatever you talk about in that day’s minilesson, you’ll want to lend your full weight toward reminding students to draw on their full repertoire of strategies. And you will want to check that you are not inadvertently conveying the message in your minilesson: “Wait until I can get you started on today’s piece of writing.” Students should not feel the minilesson strategy is one they must use before writing or that they need your approval before settling in to write. It is crucial that middle school students in the RWP workshops can use and reuse their repertoire of strategies and do so with independence.

You’ll also want to be sure you don’t overload your class with too many strategies. Any one RWP strategy can be used over and over and over, so they do not need many. Of course, it’s okay if in just one day you lay out several possible strategies for generating writing. You could, for example, demonstrate one in the minilesson, another in your mid-workshop teaching point, and still another in your share. It is important that over time your students rely less and less on strategies for generating writing, coming to regard life itself as one big source of stories! As soon as your students are living like writers, they’ll find that true stories come to mind without relying on any particular strategy. Everything and anything that a person sees, does, thinks, and feels can remind us of the stories we have to tell.

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Lift the Level of the Entries Your Students Collect: Revising Your Students' Knowledge of Narrative Writing Even Before They Write Their Draft

Remember that you never need to devote more than two, at the most three, days at the start of any unit to the challenge of equipping writers with strategies for generating writing. In no time, students will have plenty of strategies to draw from and then you will want to teach in ways that lift the level of the entries they write. Look at their entries, and think back to all they learned the previous year. More than likely, students will have been taught to write about focused events, to start with dialogue or a small action, and, above all, to storytell rather than merely comment on the event. But then, it is likely they will not be doing all of these things that they were taught, so you may need to reteach the essentials of narrative writing.

Depending on their previous writing experiences, some will need to be reminded that narratives are just that—stories. In a personal narrative, one character (presumably the writer) experiences one thing, then the next, then the next. Students may also need to be reminded that their narratives will be more effective if they zoom in on a small episode, telling the detailed chronology of that one twenty-minute (or so) episode. With reminders, they can write entries in which they retell not the entire visit to Grandma's farm but rather the portion of their visit when the pigs got loose. The main reason to zoom in is that this makes it more likely that the writer will relive an episode with enough detail that the reader, too, can experience the event.

Teachers should always be reminding students of the importance of making a movie in the mind in order to write a story. If a student talks "all about" an event, summarizing it with sentences such as, "It was a good baseball game. We won 6 to 2. I got a lot of hits. It was exciting," then the student is commenting on the game rather than telling the story of it. This writer, then, will not yet have grasped the idea of writing in a storyteller's voice. If, on the other hand, this piece begins, "I grabbed a bat and walked up to the plate. I looked at the pitcher and nodded. 'I'm ready,' I said," then the student is writing a story. Most students need to be reminded to make movies in their mind and to write so readers can picture exactly what is happening.

The RWP has found a typical pattern for our students is that each year they come into our classrooms in September and often hide what they have learned the year before. In June they may have been writing three pages in a sitting and may have woven in sophisticated narrative elements, but the following September they write far less and sometimes act as if they do not even know how to collect ideas! At this early stage in the writing process you may wish to remind them of all they learned in prior years. You could refer back to the chart of "Qualities of Good Writing" you made from looking at their on-demand pieces and the *Narrative Writing Continuum*. You could reference their conversation with you on the first day about their routines from last year, and if you're lucky enough to be in a school that contains a fifth grade, you might even hand back their notebooks or old drafts from the end of last year.

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Your students could reread their writing from the prior year and think, “What did I do in this piece that I want to be sure to do as I write this year?” Then, they can study the entries they have generated this year and think, “What have I continued to do as a writer? What did I forget to do?” As they go back into their notebooks to continue writing, they can set their purpose, working to incorporate all that they know about narrative writing from the very start of the writing process. If you are not lucky enough to have previous writing from your students, then hold onto the feeling you are experiencing right now, “Wow, that would have been great to have.” Plan to do this looking back across your school year—and maybe even plan to help out their seventh-grade teachers by passing these sorts of student artifacts up.

**Bend Two—Planning and Drafting Using All We Know of Narrative Structure and Craft**

**Selecting a Seed Idea and Rehearsing for Writing**

After students generate narrative entries for about four days, you will want to teach them to reread these and to choose one entry to develop. Each writer can star the selected entry. Then you’ll want to teach writers some strategies for rehearsing for writing. As students become more experienced, they can do more and more rehearsal. Most middle school students profit from being told that writers often take a few minutes to plan their writing. Tell them, “If we’re writing a nonfiction book, we plan by making outlines with main ideas and supportive evidence. But when we are writing narratives, the easiest way to plan a piece is to make very quick sketches of scenes, or storyboards. The decision about what to include and what to bypass, what to stress and what to skip, should be informed by the writer’s need to put his or her message forward. The question, “How do I start my story?” really can’t be answered, save in tandem with the question, “What is it I really want my reader to know and to feel?”

Writers also prepare for writing by asking, “What am I trying to show about myself through this story? What do I want readers to know about me? How can I bring that meaning out in this episode?” Storytelling can be a way to rehearse for writing, and it is important to raise the level of students’ storytelling. You may want to teach students to plan a story with a beginning, middle, and end, and before they tell the story, to think, “What do I want my listener to feel?” You could also teach students that storytellers stretch out the good parts, trying to be sure those parts really capture the listener. They can rehearse aloud with their writing partner, using their best storyteller voice to pull them into their piece. This allows them to not only practice punching out the most vivid, compelling parts of their story, it supports them in expressing an elaborated idea both creatively and concisely.

**Drafting in One Sitting and Revising to Get to the Heart**

The RWP strongly suggests students write the whole draft, quickly, nonstop, in a single day’s writing workshop. Our experience is that stories tend to be vastly more coherent and powerful when they are written quickly, under pressure, and in one sitting. Some teachers may lean toward asking a few students to write their drafts in story booklets, and we agree that the booklets may

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help your strugglers, but we are convinced that single sheets will be better for helping writers get lost in the rush of the story.

You may need to tell students that the magic of writing will not happen if writers follow their time lines doggedly. Good writing comes with a strong dose of imagination. Writers make movies in their minds and put that whole story onto the page. For example, a writer who is telling the story of going to a school dance may know that he first wants to tell about the fact that he walked into the school gym. You'll want her to picture the whole drama of doing that, to almost act it out in her mind, and to write like this: "I arrived early at the dance. The school gym was not that full this early, so I sat on the first chair I saw. Sara walked in with a bunch of our friends. I was about to stand up and say hi when I notice her look at me, but then look away, like I wasn't even there. I wiggled in my chair, trying to decide if I should stand up or stay seated. I felt like I couldn't get my legs to work. We had been friends since elementary school. But right now, something was different."

By this time, the RWP student writer should feel as if she is reliving the event, and the goal for writing-time will be to let her pen fly, writing on and on and on, recapturing the truth of the experience. Tell your students that they will have just one or two days to write the entire draft, and they are to keep their pencils moving all day long as they relive the event. As you move among your students, look for students who are summarizing instead of storytelling and, if you can, intervene now and help them get started with an entirely new draft, referencing the flash-draft, redraft process from before.

In previous years your students probably worked on revising different leads. It is now less important for your sixth graders to spend a minilesson only learning that they could start a story with dialogue, with a small action, or by conveying the setting. Instead your lesson might center on this flash-draft, redraft strategy. You could say, "Writers, when I was in high school I had a really important assignment due at the end of the year. I spent an entire month on it, just like we often do in writing workshop. But guess what, just a few days before it was due, I lost it! I could not find it anywhere! I panicked, but my mother suggested that I just sit down and write it over. She said I already had all of the ideas in my mind and this time when I write it would probably come out even better. And you know what? It did. Starting completely over again made me do things that I had not done before. Whether you do this because of an accident, like in this case, or on purpose, giving your writing a brand-new, totally different, fresh try can lead to surprising results."

Next you might demonstrate how you can take a key part of your story—like the lead or the climax—and write it out quickly, in just a minute or two. Then, show your students how you put that piece away and write anew. First ask yourself, "What is a completely different way this section could go?" and aim for the biggest, most dramatic change you can consider. Storytell the first moment of your narrative when, in gym, you felt hurt when your friend didn't pick you for the kickball team. Then try a completely different version from that same memory, making the

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scene not the one that happened in gym but the moment right after in math class when he came into the room and you wouldn't sit by him. Even if your students do not end up using the redraft in their final piece, help them see how you can learn from both, "Oh, wow, when I wrote this new version, I realized I wasn't just upset because of kickball; I was upset because I felt like Jonathan was making new friends. I need to work that into the first try I wrote."

**Bend Three—Drafting Additional Narratives and Selecting, Revising, and Editing for Publication**

Now you'll ask your students to do it again, with more independence. That is, they'll get started again, using some favorite generating strategies. They'll fast draft a completely new small moment. They'll revise on the run. This should take two or three days. Now you're ready to start deep revision—and kids can work on more than one draft.

Once your students have written these drafts, you'll need to do some assessment to decide the sort of help different small groups of writers will perhaps need. You may notice that some students' drafts are swamped with dialogue. The RWP has seen often readers can't discern even who is speaking or what is happening. When you see this sort of writing, it is likely the child has made a movie in his mind (a great thing) and simply hasn't mastered this tool yet.

Over-reliance on dialogue represents a step forward, but it is a problem you'll need to address. Teach these students that writers sometimes realize, after having written a draft, that our writing provides only a soundtrack, so we revise our writing to show the aspects of the story that we have left out. You can also remind writers that good writing comes from a variety of thought, action, and dialogue. This could be taught in an absurdly mechanical way (no writer thinks about writing as "Now my thought is . . . Now my action is . . ."), but if writers have a sense for the various strands that are woven together in a narrative, their writing will become stronger.

Within dialogue, you might teach your writers to develop dialogue that reveals characters' traits and emotions. You might show them how to contrast what characters think, with what they say. The real move here is to demonstrate how writers are not working on diary entries, but are instead thinking like writers, making decisions with an audience in mind.

Then, too, it will help if you immerse your students in examples of beautifully written narratives and raise their ambitions as writers. You can invite them to simply read (or listen to) the texts, allowing those texts to affect them however they do. Then, afterward, have them ask themselves, "What has this writer done that has affected me?" Writer's revisions are always informed by our sense of how stories tend to go. This could become your entry into teaching students that stories are not, in fact, chains of equally developed micro-events as illustrated by a timeline. Rather, stories include problems and solutions and are characterized by rising action and increasing tension. Have your students ask, "What effect do I want to create in my text and how could I create it?"

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You may also continue to build some of your students' narrative craft muscles around developing the theme inside of their writing. For instance, you can invite your writers to hold in their minds the meaning they are trying to forward through their piece ("It was hard to keep friends the June before middle school"), then pick a scene from their writing and consider how the details they include about the setting can orient their reader toward this meaning.

Additionally, remind students to draw on all they already know about revision. Students will have learned the year before and the week before in the RWP workshops that writers reread and ask, "Where is the heart of my story?" They stretch that part of the story out, writing it with more detail and enthusiasm. Remind students to tell the external and the internal stories. Remind them often that the strategies they learned last year need to be drawn upon again and again. That is, explicitly teach transference.

While much of this unit is about moving your sixth graders away from simply summarizing into really playing out moments as if telling the story, some students might be able to consider ways of including well-crafted, idea-based passages to further forward their meaning. For sixth graders, there is a danger that some students will take a lesson such as this, so early in the year, and undo all of your teaching up to this point. So there is a good chance you will choose to use this as a point of differentiation in your class, with individual or small-group conferences giving some of your students early practice with an eighth-grade Standard, "Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, and reflection, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters."

The Common Core State Standards expects that sixth graders will "engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and introducing a narrator and/or characters." That is, the author needs to establish a situation and introduce the narrator or characters in the story. So, you might take this time, in the midst of revision, to ask students to reread their writing and think, "Is the situation clear to my reader? Do they know not only when and where this is happening, but also why it matters?" For some writers, this will be clear. For others, it will be known to the writer but not the reader. If that's the case, you might teach them that they can think about the meaning that they want to convey to the reader and then bring that meaning forward at the start of their piece by creating a larger context for the moment. For example, if a child is writing a story about riding a roller coaster, she can think, "What's important to know about this particular ride on the roller coaster?" She is apt to say that it was the first time she was riding it and was terrified, or she was trying to impress a group of friends by facing a hidden fear. Then, she might start her story with, "It was the summer I was going to be popular. It was the summer I was going to show off for my friends. It was the summer I was going to face the roller coaster."

Be sure to emphasize that writers need to reflect on what is working in their writing and to make plans based on their self-reflections. Help writers use each other as critical friends. You may want to use your teaching shares as opportunities for your students to meet with each other and

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discuss ways to make their writing better. Each writer might approach partnership time with ideas for what he or she wants to work on, and then the partner might give suggestions on how to do so. As writing workshop draws to a close, you will likely want to emphasize that writers should set their plan for writing time the next day, so increasingly writers are setting their own agendas rather than expecting you to do so in minilessons.

In this RWP unit, the real goal is to improve the quality of the writing—and of the writers. Your deeper lesson throughout the unit will be this: Writers never stop learning how to write better. It is not enough to learn that an author uses dialogue and then, presto, students add dialogue to their drafts, checking that item off as if on some list. Writers are constantly engaged in the long-term continual study of good writing and good writing habits.

**Publishing**

When you finish this unit, publish your students' narratives. Publishing can happen in a variety of ways, such as publishing celebrations, where the narratives are placed on the tabletops alongside a blank sheet of loose leaf. Allow students to move about, reading and offering positive comments to their peers. Narratives can be posted on bulletin boards or alongside hallways. Classroom anthologies can be assembled and earn a place in the classroom library. These are suggestions, and you may imagine other ways to celebrate and go public with student work. You may now want to devote another day to an on-demand writing assessment. If you do, give your students the very same directions you gave at the start of the year, only this time let them know you want to see what they have learned from the month of studying narrative writing. Then, once again, be sure to insist they work with independence.

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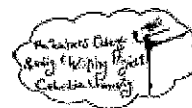


## Unit Map 2012-2013

Columbia University Teachers College

**Collaboration / Writing 6\*** / Grade 6 (Middle School)

Friday, June 15, 2012, 4:19PM



### Unit 1 Raising the Level of Personal Narrative (Week 1, 4 Weeks)

#### Unit Rationale

#### **WORK IN PROGRESS/DRAFT**

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#### **Rationale:**

This unit is geared towards instructing students who have had years of experience with writing personal narratives: towards teaching more nuanced, complicated storytelling, a more reflective stance, and better use of figurative language and other literary techniques than in prior years. Students who demonstrate that they are not yet skilled in zooming in on a tight time frame, creating a story arc of tension, and using a repertoire of dialogue, action and inner thinking will need extra support in these basics of the genre. Narrative writing is one of the three cornerstones of writing in both the Common Core State Standards and the NAEP, and this unit will teach students to lift the level of that work, drawing on a repertoire of past and new skills. In addition, as an introduction to writing in middle school, this unit will set routines and habits in place that will support sustained writing with volume, as well as the reflective peer and self assessment practices that will bump the work up to higher levels of DOK and set the stage for self-initiation and inquiry, as recommended by Danielson and Marzano.

#### **Overview:**

The unit described here gestures toward memoir writing, providing scaffolds for our writers to produce more idea-driven, thematic narratives found in that genre. The first bend teaches students to generate meaningful story ideas quickly, then immediately begin the work of crafting and revising entries based on qualities of narrative writing that will be visible to them through teacher modeling, use of mentor texts, and inquiry around student work. The second bend focuses on planning and drafting, giving ample opportunity to teach into narrative craft and lift the level of student's use of story structure to convey meaning. Finally, students will learn to quickly draft additional possible narratives using all they know again, and select the strongest of their drafts to revise and bring to publication. This emphasis on multiple drafts will teach students to develop a repertoire of writing skills, rather than waiting for a new lesson to lead them every day.

#### **Big Idea/Enduring Understanding**

1. Writers of effective personal narratives draw on all they know about writing well—about the importance of detail, structure, voice, and, because this is narrative writing, show don't tell—and also draw on what they know about the structure of a story.
2. Just as scientists rely on the scientific process whenever they are investigating anything, so, too, writers rely on the writing process. Writers have a repertoire of rehearsal, drafting and revision strategies, and throughout the writing process, writers make goals for themselves, and then choose the strategy that will help them achieve those goals.

Essential Questions for Learners	Guiding Questions for Teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How can I write a true story from my life, using all I know about narrative writing, that draws in the reader and conveys something important about myself and my experience?</li> <li>How can I use the writing process to continually set high standards for my writing, reflect on whether I have met those standards or not, and work again towards newer, more challenging goals?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How can I help students use all they know about narrative writing to generate meaningful true topics, and to revise right from the start to get to the heart of the stories they are telling?</li> <li>How can I help students plan and draft personal narratives, using narrative structure and the craft possibilities of that structure to support their developing and revising well-paced stories that convey something true and important?</li> <li>How can I help students to craft another personal narrative, more quickly this time, transferring the process from earlier in the unit to another, more independent round of drafting and revision, and to select and publish a strong example of the genre?</li> </ul>

### Key Areas of Focus in the CCSS

#### CCSS: English Language Arts 6-12, CCSS: Grade 6, Writing

3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

- W.6.3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.
- W.6.3a. Engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically.
- W.6.3b. Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
- W.6.3e. Provide a conclusion that follows from the narrated experiences or events.

### Additional Standards Particular to Your State

#### Common Core Learning Standards

Range of Writing

10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

W.6.10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

W.6.3c. Use a variety of transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence and signal shifts from one time frame or setting to another.

W.6.3d. Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to convey experiences and events.

Cross Curricular to Cross Grade Level Skills	Rubrics/Continua
<p><b><i>Students in Fifth Grade were asked to:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Write long about an important memory.</li><li>▪ Use dialogue to help the reader understand what the characters were feeling.</li><li>▪ Look at the setting and how the setting can help the reader understand the plot in a deeper way.</li></ul> <p><b>Parallel Expectations in Content Areas require students to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Learning prehistoric period and the people involved in creating the government structure. The motivations of the people to create this structure.</li><li>▪ The setting and the regions and how they dictate the way the characters act and feel.</li><li>▪ Looking at the different subgroups rich vs poor and the different ways they lived.</li></ul>	<p>See attached for Writing Process Continuum and Narrative Writing Continuum.</p> <p>A student-facing rubric should be designed in conjunction with students.</p> <p><u>Narrative Writing Continuum</u></p> <p><u>Writing Process</u></p>
<b>Academic Technical Vocabulary</b>	
<p><b>Domain-Specific Vocabulary:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Narrative</li><li>▪ Climax</li><li>▪ Resolution</li><li>▪ Setting</li></ul> <p><b>Academic Technical Vocabulary</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ genuine</li><li>▪ excellent</li><li>▪ replied</li><li>▪ furthermore</li><li>▪ consequently</li><li>▪ reliable</li></ul>	

Sequenced Learning Plans/Minilessons	<u>Assessments</u> Depth of Knowledge (DOK) Levels
<p>Below is a series of teaching points that could be used during whole class minilessons, mid-workshop teaching points, teaching shares and could also support some small group instruction. Teachers will alter this list, especially by adding to it in order to respond to students' needs, making sure to avoid extending the unit beyond the month.</p> <p><b>Guiding Questions / Bend One:</b></p> <p>How can I help students use all they know about narrative writing to generate meaningful true topics, and to revise right from the start to get to the heart of the stories they are telling?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writers use all they know about themselves as writers and about strategies for generating personal narrative writing to get started with notebook entries right away. We think back to strategies that have worked for us in the past, and we try those first.</li> <li>• Writers know that our lives are worth writing about, and we mine memories of moments of strong emotion, to find the anecdotes (small moments) we want to write as notebook entries. Then we start writing them as notebook entries.</li> <li>• As we write moments of strong emotion, we already do our best to 'make a movie,' which means slow down the narration and tell it like a story, with action, details, dialogue, and inner thinking. We use what we know about good storytelling.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Formative: DOK 3 Strategic Thinking: On-Demand Narrative Writing</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. This unit will begin with an on-demand writing assessment. Students will be given a chance to show off all that they know about narrative writing. The prompt might begin, "I'm really eager to understand what you can do as writers, so before you do anything else, please spend today writing the very best personal narrative, the best small moment story, of one particular time in your life. You'll have forty-five minutes to write this true story of one small moment. Write in a way that shows me all that you know about how to do this kind of writing."</li> <li>2. Students will not be coached during this assessment and will not be reminded of strategies or techniques. The assessment will be completely hands-off, so as to see what the students are able to do independently.</li> <li>3. After students have completed their work, the pieces will be collected and assessed against the Narrative Writing Continuum. The specific teaching of the unit will be adapted to align to the needs of the class as a whole. Individual and small-group teaching will also be informed by this data-in-hand.</li> </ol> <p><b>Formative: DOK 3 Strategic Thinking: Writing Conference</b></p>
<p><b>Guiding Questions/Bend Two:</b></p> <p>How can I help students plan and draft personal narratives, using narrative structure and the craft possibilities of that structure to support their developing and revising well-paced stories that convey something true and important?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writers use story structure to plan out how the first draft will go. We plan for building tension, for including just the most important scenes, and for a resolution at the end that shows that some kind of change has happened, either within the characters, or with the issue the characters are facing.</li> <li>• As writers draft, we try out different leads and</li> </ul>	<p>In a writing conference, the teacher observes and/or interviews, researching especially to understand what the writer can do, can almost do, and cannot yet do, and to understand the new work that a writer is attempting to do, the challenges the writer is confronting.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The teacher approaches a conference, already recalling what he or she knows about the student as a writer. The teacher may look back on notes from previous conferences, small group work and assessments, and/or may watch for a bit to notice patterns in what the writer is already engaged in doing.</li> </ol>

different endings, and we choose one that leads the reader into the story with the greatest intensity, and out of the story with the clearest meaning, lesson, or change.

- Writers know that one way to revise our stories is to consider the dialogue. We can use dialogue, for instance, to show characters' traits and emotions. We can use dialogue to show hints of tension. We invent our dialogue as writers, rather than relying on memory.

### **Guiding Questions/Bend Three:**

How can I help students to craft another personal narrative, more quickly this time, transferring the process from earlier in the unit to another, more independent round of drafting and revision, and to select and publish a strong example of the genre?

- Writers recall all they know and apply these strategies to get started with agency and independence. We generate ideas quickly, and get started writing high quality entries.
- Writers consider time and tense in their pieces. If we use any flashbacks, we especially want to match up our tenses. If we have dialogue, then our dialogue is often in present tense even when the past tense is used for narration.
- Writers use their partners to help with editing and revision. We read each other's stories out loud, listening for parts that don't make sense. We listen for the tone of voice and match our punctuation choice to the reader's tone. We double check capitalization of places and names. We help each other get ready to publish.

2. The teacher may begin by saying to the writer what he

or she has already noticed, asking the writer to say more about that ("I notice you have a list of possible story ideas. What were you planning for your next step?") or the teacher may begin by recalling the last conversation held with the reader ("Last time we talked, you were going to work on....How's that been going?") or the teacher may begin simply by asking the reader about his or her work as a writer ("What have you been working on as a writer? How have you been pushing yourself to do new work as a writer? Have you been doing any of the things on our chart?")

3. The writer talks. The teacher uses gestures, follow-up questions, and active-listening to coax the writer to say more, to elaborate, and to provide examples.

4. The teacher develops a tentative theory about the student as a writer, and about the new work the student is doing and could be doing. Based on this, the teacher decides what he or she could compliment and could teach the writer.

5. The teacher compliments the writer, making sure to name what the writer is doing well in such a way that the writer transfers that to other days, other texts.

6. The teacher then sets the writer up to work towards a new goal. The teacher makes the goal as concrete and specific and alluring as possible, showing the writer the specifics strategies he or she could use in order to make progress towards this new goal. The writer may get started working towards the new goal, with the teacher coaching into this work. The teacher assures the writer of future follow-up.

### **Formative: DOK 3 Strategic Thinking: Final Drafts, Drafting Packets, & Reflections**

At the end of this unit, students will turn in their final drafts of personal narratives, plus the drafting packet that includes their initial drafts

and revisions. You will also ask students to write a reflection, answering these or similar questions:

1. What was the most successful strategy that I tried during this unit of study? What made this strategy work for me? How did it help my writing?
2. In what ways is my final draft more powerful than my first draft? What did I do as a writer to improve my work during revision and editing?
3. What do I still have to work on in this genre? What parts of this kind of writing are still tricky for me?
4. In my next piece like this, what will I try that will push me to write an even better piece than I've written this time?

These questions will require students to analyze their own work across the unit, to evaluate where they have made progress and where they have yet to improve. It will also offer a window into how they have internalized your teaching: what they understand about narrative writing and what makes it powerful. The final drafts themselves, along with the drafting packets, will offer an opportunity to take stock of students' narrative writing abilities, using the narrative continuum once again, and to assess their use of the writing process, noting how they took advantage of instruction and class and home time to improve their writing from its inception in the writing notebook until its publication in the form of final drafts.

**Summative: DOK 4 Extended Thinking:  
Study of Writers Notebooks**


Students will study their work across the writers notebook and reflect on what strategies have been effective for them and where they need to continue to work to master certain skills and strategies. They will write to set goals for the upcoming narrative unit of study.

**Resources**


**Texts Used(fiction, non-fiction, on-line, media, etc...)**


There is a suggested list on the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project site for you if needed.

**Websites and Web-tools used**

 <http://dww.ed.gov/>



 <http://www.readwritethink.org/>

 <http://galleryofwriting.org/>

### Complex Text Levels

Text Gradient Band 5/6

### Suggested Poems

Meyers, Walter Dean. *Here in Harlem: Poems in Many Voices*. Holiday House, 2004.

Meyers, Walter Dean. *Street Love*. Amistad, 2007.

Murray, John. *Poems to Live By in Uncertain Times*. Beacon Press, 2001.

Nims, John Frederick. *Western Mind: An Introductory to Poetry*. Random House, 1974.

Nye, Naomi Shihab. *What Have You Lost?* Greenwillow, 2001.

Nye, Naomi Shihab. *19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East*. Harper Teen, 2005.

Padgett, Ron, ed. *Handbook of Poetic Forms*. Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 1987.

Pockell, Leslie. *The 100 Best Poems of All Time*. Warner Books, 2001. (Also available as a Time Warner AudioBook.)

Rosenberg, Liz. *The Invisible Ladder: An Anthology of Contemporary*.

### Professional texts

Please see the forthcoming book aligned to this unit from *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grade by Grade: A Yearlong Workshop Curriculum, Grade 6*.

### Instructional Support for Differentiation

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|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ ELL</li><li>▪ Special Education</li><li>▪ Word Work</li><li>▪ Upcoming Tests</li></ul> | <p>ELL</p> <p>A student's native language knowledge should be used to develop English language proficiency. A student's native language is the starting point for instruction in the second language. Students should be encouraged to make connections between the second language and their own languages, cultures, and lives.</p> <p>Special Education</p> <p>Modifications should always be based on IEP. A student with ADHD might require that a long-term project due in one month be divided into shorter-term assignments due once a week for four weeks. Shorter-term due dates could help any child to build their organizational skills. Additionally, task checklists, graphic organizers and periodic peer review or teacher conferencing would scaffold support by providing progress monitoring.</p> |
|--|---|

Word Work  
Verb tense: regular and irregular past tense

#### Upcoming Tests

Students in the upcoming tests are going to have to use text based evidence to help them discuss what they are saying. One thing to focus on therefore is the use of mentor text and why the author put certain information in there text to say this is important. This will help your students think about whats important and what's not. Students will begin to use literary devices in their writing. Studying these literary devices will help them not only in their writing but in recognizing them in reading as well.

#### Alternative Maps for this Unit

Alternate maps are always welcome. If you have an alternate map you would like to share, please send it to [contact@readingandwritingproject.com](mailto:contact@readingandwritingproject.com) and we will post it with your name and school.

You may consider looking at the fifth and seventh grade launching writing units. To support struggling students, we suggest pulling lessons from the fifth grade unit. For more advanced students, you may want to pull lessons from the seventh grade unit.

#### Connections to Teacher Effectiveness

At the beginning of the year, you will want to focus on the classroom environment domain. You may consider:

- How you set up your classroom
- How you organize your writing materials to support student independence
- How you make your charts to meet the needs of all the students, i.e., tactile, visual, and kinesthetic-charts should reflect your specific students' needs
- How you scaffold and review skills and lessons from previous years and units while building on this year's work
- How you make your meeting area a purposeful place and establish routines and rituals of coming to the meeting area
- How you begin work on day one

The other domain to pay attention to is instruction. You may consider:

- How you use assessment to inform your instruction. Ensure it is based on the curriculum and the needs of your students
- How you establish goals that are attainable and measurable and are visible in your instruction.